



# *South Carolina Private Lands Alligator Program Guide*

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# South Carolina Private Lands Alligator Program Guide

## South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Wildlife & Freshwater Fisheries Division Wildlife Section

By Jay Butfiloski, Wildlife Biologist, SCDNR

### Preface

This booklet was developed to provide basic information regarding the private lands alligator harvest season and what hunters will need in order to familiarize themselves with taking alligators. It includes common hunting techniques, safety tips, how to harvest an alligator, requirements for processing an alligator, and how to care for an alligator hide.

For additional information, visit [www.dnr.sc.gov](http://www.dnr.sc.gov)

or contact the Alligator Project at 843-546-6062

or the nearest SCDNR Regional Office.

<b>Region I</b>	Clemson	(864) 654-1671
<b>Region II</b>	Florence	(843) 661-4768
<b>Region III</b>	Columbia	(803) 734-3886
<b>Region IV</b>	Charleston	(843) 953-9300

### Acknowledgements

We express our sincere appreciation to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources for allowing us to include some of the basic content and artwork from their alligator booklet for use in South Carolina. We also would like to express our appreciation to biologists with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for the use of information from their “Public Waters Alligator Harvest Training and Orientation Manual” in the preparation of this book. SCDNR also thanks Texas Parks and Wildlife Department © 2002 for the use of the artwork found on page 17.

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# INTRODUCTION

Recognizing that private landowners support an abundant population of alligators in South Carolina, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR or DNR) began development of an integral component of South Carolina's Alligator Management Program -- the Private Lands Alligator Management Program. This program provides a means of managing alligators on a sustained-yield basis while acknowledging them as an aesthetically, ecologically and economically valuable resource. The Private Lands Program offers landowners an opportunity to benefit from the harvest of alligators and thereby provides incentive to protect vanishing wetland habitats necessary for the perpetuation of alligators, as well as other wetland wildlife species. The Private Lands Program is intended for those properties that have a significant amount of alligator habitat. This program is not intended to assist with one or two "problem" alligators, as the Department can assist these landowners in these situations through the Alligator Depredation Program. The intent of this program is to allow the ongoing management of the alligator resource on private property.

The purpose of this package is to provide the necessary information to landowners and trappers interested in participating in the Private Lands Alligator Management Program. This guide will serve as an overview to requirements and regulations. Parties interested in specific regulations are urged to contact the Department.

***All fees from the Private Lands Alligator Management Program are retained by DNR and by law are applied to the research and management of the alligator resource in South Carolina.***



Ted Borg, SCDNR

# ALLIGATORS IN SOUTH CAROLINA: HISTORY & BIOLOGY

## HISTORY

The American alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*), a reptile, is a member of the Family Alligatoridae. Alligator populations reached their lowest levels in the early 1960's because of several factors. However, management and conservation actions by state and federal governments required by the Endangered Species Act (ESA) allowed the alligator population to increase. They were removed from "total protection" status under the ESA in 1987. The alligator is now listed as "threatened by similarity of appearance" because of its likeness to other protected crocodilians worldwide. This provides greater flexibility for South Carolina and other southeastern states to manage alligator populations. At least 100,000 alligators occur in the state of South Carolina.

## RANGE

Alligators occur from the southern tip of Texas to the northeastern part of North Carolina. In South Carolina, they are typically found south of the fall line (which roughly traverses the state from I-20 in Aiken to Kershaw County, then up Highway US 1 toward Cheraw in Chesterfield County). There is no evidence that alligator populations reproduce north of the fall line, and it is suspected that many of the alligators found above the fall line may have been illegally relocated. A very small number of individual alligators naturally show up in these areas. Alligators usually remain in the area where they were hatched for two to three years before establishing their own range. Females generally have small home ranges, while males may occupy a home territory of more than two square miles. Severe drought or flood conditions may cause alligators to move considerable distances in search of suitable waters.

## HABITAT

Alligators occupy a variety of wetland habitats in South Carolina. They normally are found in marshes, swamps, rivers, farm ponds and lakes in the wild, but also have been found in ditches, neighborhoods, drainage canals, retention ponds, roadways, golf course ponds and sometimes in swimming pools. Nearly any water body in the Lowcountry has the potential to harbor alligators at one time or another. During courtship and breeding, from April to May, alligators prefer open waters. During the remainder of the year, males prefer open and deep waters, while females seek out nesting habitat in secluded areas with shallow water and heavy vegetation.

## **BIOLOGY**

Alligators can live up to 60 years in captivity, but in the wild they rarely live more than 50 years. Male alligators can presumably grow up to 16 feet in length, although 13-footers are rare. Female alligators can grow up to 10 feet. After breeding, females lay an average of 35 to 40 eggs that incubate for about 65 days. Hatchlings are about 8 to 10 inches in length. About 20 percent of the young will survive to maturity. The others fall victim to predators such as raccoons, birds, snakes, otters and other alligators. They grow approximately 8 to 10 inches per year for the first few years and will reach sexual maturity at about 6 to 7 feet in length. Large alligators can reach weights of more than 800 pounds. Alligators are carnivores and will eat almost anything they can catch. During the first few years their diet consists mainly of small prey such as snails, crayfish, frogs, insects and other invertebrates. Depending on their size, larger alligators may eat fish, turtles, snakes, water birds, raccoons, beavers and otters. Alligators also feed on carrion and, given the opportunity, they may also eat pets and smaller domestic animals such as goats and pigs.

## **BENEFITS**

Alligators are ecologically important. They help maintain the population balance of certain prey species, and they help shape and modify habitat. During times of severe drought, alligators are known to dig holes (gator holes) to concentrate water. This helps the alligator survive and provides a water source to many other species of plants and animals in the area.

## **HUMAN-ALLIGATOR CONFLICTS**

In 1989, the SCDNR initiated a problem-alligator program that allows contracted agent trappers to capture and harvest specific problem alligators greater than 4 feet in length. A nuisance alligator is one that exhibits aggressive behavior toward humans or domestic animals, has become habituated to people, shows symptoms of some debilitating illness or injury, or inhabits recreational waters intended primarily for swimming. Agent trappers harvest approximately 350 problem alligators annually in South Carolina.

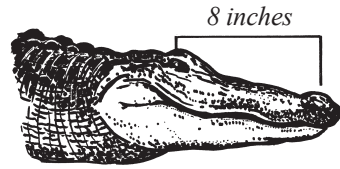
## **ESTIMATING ALLIGATOR LENGTH**

The length of an alligator can be estimated by determining (in inches) the distance between the center of the skull (between the eyes) and the nostrils. This number then can be translated into feet to give an estimate of the entire length of the animal. For example, if the measurement on the top diagram was 8 inches, one can estimate that the entire animal is approximately 8 feet long (see illustration to right).

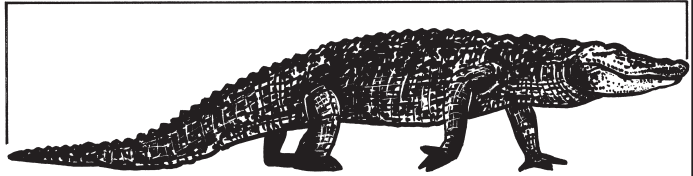
### ***Estimating Alligator Length:***

The length of an alligator can be estimated by determining the length (in inches) between the center of the skull (between the eyes) and the nostrils. This number gives the approximate length of the alligator in feet.

For example, if the measurement on the diagram to the right was eight inches, one can estimate that the entire animal is approximately 8 feet long.



8 Feet



*Artwork courtesy of GADNR*

## **PRIVATE LANDS APPLICATION PROCESS**

South Carolina's Private Lands hunting season is September 1 to May 31 of the following year. There is no fee to apply, and landowners must apply by August 1. A property owner may request any number of harvest tags. However, the Department will consider this request and allocate a reasonable number of harvest tags based on available alligator habitat and the applicant's request. No specific size quotas will be assigned, but the Department will continue to make harvest recommendations for both size and number. No alligators under 4 feet in length can be harvested. Alligators under 4 feet taken incidentally must be tagged with a harvest tag issued to the property, but cannot be disposed of commercially.

To apply, a property owner must:

- Complete the Private Lands Management Program application. This form must be typed or printed legibly in ink. An electronic form (in PDF format) of this application is available from the Department by contacting the Alligator Project at 803-734-3609.
- Include a plat of the property to be hunted and an aerial photograph (at 1:24,000 scale or less) showing the water areas that are to be enrolled in the Private Lands Alligator Harvest Program.
- You may submit a request for any number of tags for your property. DNR personnel will consider this request when assigning a quota for your property. This quota may be less than your requested number of tags. In general, a reasonable number of tags will be considered based on amount of water acreage of the property.



- ***Harvest tags are \$10 each and are nonrefundable.*** A harvest report and all unused tags must be returned to SCDNR **by July 1** following the close of the season. Failure to do so could result in denial of next season's entry into Private Lands Alligator Harvest Program.
- There is a permit fee of \$10 in addition to any tag fees.
- Do not include any money for the permit or harvest tags at time of application. You will be contacted regarding your tag allotment, fees, and all applicable deadlines for submitting tag fees.

*Harvest tags are specific for your property and cannot be used in public waters or under any other alligator harvest program. The only size requirement is that all alligators taken must be greater than 4 feet in length. Alligators under 4 feet taken incidentally must be tagged with a harvest tag, but cannot be disposed of commercially*

**Note:** A year ending report will be required by all participants in the Private Lands Alligator Harvest Program. A copy of this report form will be sent to all participants.

***The deadline to apply is August 1. Applications received after this is date may be restricted or denied based on the number of tags available, or at the discretion of the Department.***

## **PREPARING FOR THE HARVEST**

### **HUNTING CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED**

- ☐ Private Lands Alligator hunting permit, alligator harvest tag(s), and state hunting license (and nonresident alligator fees, if applicable).
  - ☐ Lighting equipment. A light may be used.
  - ☐ Preferred capture equipment: snare, gig, harpoon or arrow.
  - ☐ Restraint equipment: snare for neck and snare for snout.
  - ☐ Preferred dispatch equipment: firearm or bangstick.
  - ☐ Knife to cut into alligator's tail to insert the temporary alligator harvest tag.
  - ☐ Preferred cooling method.
  - ☐ Processing plans.
  - ☐ Harvest report form (must be updated within 24 hours of harvest).
- \*\* No person may use alligator harvest tags issued for privately-owned habitat on publicly-owned property.**
- \*\* Alligator hunters, while on property designated under the Private Lands Alligator Management Program, must possess an unused alligator harvest tag for that property.**



## LICENSE REQUIREMENTS

### **SOUTH CAROLINA RESIDENTS AND RESIDENT PARTICIPANTS**

SC Private Lands Program Hunters MUST:

- possess a copy of the Private Lands Alligator Hunting Permit
- possess a valid SC Hunting Licence (Big Game Permit is not required).

SC Resident Participants/Assistants\* MUST:

- possess a valid SC Hunting license if 16 years of age or older (Big Game Permit is not required).

\* includes all persons accompanying a permitted alligator hunter and actively participating in the hunt (i.e. anyone who tries to find, seek, obtain, pursue, or diligently search for alligators).

### **NON-RESIDENTS AND/OR NON-RESIDENT PARTICIPANTS**

Nonresident Private Lands Program Hunters MUST:

- possess a copy of the Private Lands Alligator Hunting Permit
- possess a valid SC Hunting Licence (Big Game Permit is not required).
- pay the \$200 Alligator Hunting Fee before going afield (this fee may be paid at any license vendor location, online at [www.dnr.sc.gov](http://www.dnr.sc.gov) or by phone at 1-866-714-3611).

Non-resident Participants/Assistants\* MUST:

- possess a valid SC Hunting license if 16 years of age or older (Big Game Permit is not required)
- pay the \$200 Alligator Hunting Fee if 16 years of age or older before going afield (this fee may be paid at any license vendor location, online [www.dnr.sc.gov](http://www.dnr.sc.gov) or by phone at 1-866-714-3611).

\* includes all persons accompanying a permitted alligator hunter and actively participating in the hunt (i.e. anyone who tries to find, seek, obtain, pursue, or diligently search for alligators).

***SPECIAL NOTE: The \$200 Nonresident Alligator Hunting Fee applies to ALL permitted nonresident hunters and ALL non-resident hunting assistants 16 years of age or older.***

## PRE-HARVEST TIPS

- Familiarize yourself with the information contained in this booklet.
- Purchase your equipment and become familiar with it in advance.
- Determine who will accompany you for the harvest (i.e. select a guide if desired) and ensure that everyone has appropriate licenses.

- Determine who will handle each responsibility during the course of the harvest (i.e. drive the boat, snare, dispatch, etc.).
- Develop a plan for how you are going to cool the alligator as quickly as possible once it is harvested.
- Keep your Private Lands Harvest permit and tag(s) in a safe place. Replacements tags **cannot** be issued.

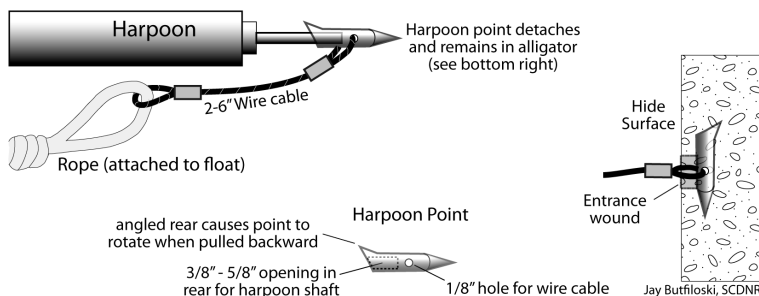
## ALLIGATOR CAPTURE AND HARVEST TECHNIQUES

**IMPORTANT SAFETY NOTE:** There are several effective techniques available for capturing and harvesting alligators. Keep in mind that while these techniques have proved effective in alligator harvests, an element of danger is involved with the process. The techniques, equipment and practices described are provided to demonstrate practical techniques that agent alligator trappers have used in conjunction with the nuisance alligator program. Hunters should be aware that many experienced agent alligator trappers, using similar techniques, have been bitten and some seriously injured. You are urged to use extreme caution when handling alligators. If you are inexperienced in handling alligators, SCDNR encourages you to obtain the assistance of an experienced guide and plan on attending one of the voluntary training and orientation sessions.

All effective alligator hunting techniques have a few common elements:

- Alligators are often hunted after dark (although some hunters use snatchhooks on animals during twilight hours).
- Alligators can be located at night by their reflective eyeshine, which is a characteristic red glow.
- Alligators should be approached quietly keeping the beam of the spotlight directly in or just above their eyes.

Diagram of a Commonly Used Harpoon Point



## CAPTURE METHODS\*

For the Private Lands Alligator Management Program, alligators may be captured using the following methods:

- Firearms - centerfire rifles only - shotguns or rimfires cannot be used to take unrestrained alligators during daylight hours. (Daylight hours are defined as 30 minutes before official sunrise to 30 minutes after official sunset.) ***It is unlawful to shoot or attempt to shoot an unrestrained alligator at any other time.***
- Hand-held snares      • Hand-held harpoons      • Snatch hooks
- Archery equipment      • Crossbows
- Live traps/snares (set hooks are not permitted)

***\* The above-listed methods apply to the Private Lands Management Program only!***

***For Private Lands Alligator Permits on broken rice fields and other lands adjacent to public waters:***

- Flooded lands which are subject to ***navigable servitude*** are public waters regardless of ownership. Only public alligator hunting is allowed on public waters.
- Taking alligators under the private lands program from remnant rice field dikes or other high ground which is bordered by navigable water on two or more sides is restricted to snares set completely out of the water and where the captured animal cannot retreat into the navigable water body. Alligators must not be taken by shooting unless restrained. Capture and recovery of alligators taken under the authority of the Private Lands Alligator Program must not occur in the navigable waters.

**Note:** It is unlawful to place a previously captured alligator back on the property in order to allow another hunter the opportunity to harvest the alligator (“Put and take” is not permitted).

## DISPATCH METHODS

Once the alligator has been captured and brought adjacent to the boat or the shore it may be dispatched. The animal may be killed with the use of a bangstick or a firearm (any caliber). To use a bangstick, the hunter should first allow the alligator’s head to go below the water’s surface. The hunter should then discharge the bangstick at the base of the skull. The animal also may be dispatched by discharging a firearm at the base of the skull. Both the bangstick and the firearm should be aimed at the brain, angled slightly forward from the rear of the

skull. Hunters should note that the improper placement and discharge of the firearm or bangstick can occasionally only knock the alligator temporarily unconscious. Remember to only discharge a bangstick underwater. Alligators may not be transported off the property alive.

***The previously listed dispatch methods apply to the Private Lands Management Program only!***

## ***NEVER ASSUME THAT ANY ALLIGATOR IS DEAD!***

Using the snare, carefully pull the alligator's snout up against the side of the boat (to the edge of the gunwales) and press the top of the snout closed with a stick to secure. Never place your hand or foot next to an alligator's jaw because they can snap sideways very quickly and cause serious injury. A rope (tossed or guided by a stick rather than your hand) can be used to temporarily secure the jaw. Once this temporary method is applied, the jaw should then be completely secured by wrapping it several times with high quality duct tape or electrical tape. As a final measure, the spinal cord should be severed at the base of the skull before placing the alligator in the bottom of the boat. Remember, the jaws should always remain taped shut when handling or transporting an "apparently" dead alligator.

## **CAPTURE AND DISPATCH TOOLS**

**Snares:** Wire snares attached to a restraining line that is loosely mounted (using a small rubber band or piece of tape) to the end of a pole are most commonly used to secure the alligator once it has been harpooned or snagged and brought under control near the boat. Snares also may be used as an initial capture technique. A snares can be hand-held, attached to a hand-held device, or set as a trip snare. Unattended set snares must be checked daily.

**Harpoons and Gigs:** Harpoons or gigs may be used for attaching a restraining line to an alligator. Harpoons or gigs consist of a penetrating point such as a straightened fish hook, detachable dart, fish gig or spear point that is attached to a restraining line. The harpoon point is typically mounted on a pole, arrow shaft or spear and is thrown. A gig (a pronged instrument with a metal or wooden pole) is jabbed.

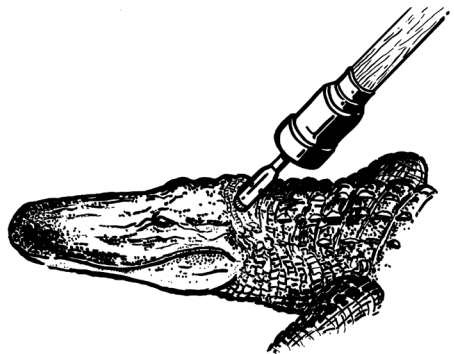
**Snatch Hooks:** Snatch hooks may be used for attaching a restraining line to an alligator. A snatch hook is a weighted treble hook that is attached to a restraining line. The hook is either hand-held or used in conjunction with a long, stout fishing rod and reel and heavy line. The hook typically is cast over the alligator or over the area where it last submerged. The



hook is then retrieved until it makes contact with the alligator, at which point it is set with a strong pull. The line should be kept tight until the animal tires, as the hook often falls out of the alligator if the line is allowed to go slack. *Baited hooks are not a legal capture method.*

**Firearms:** Any firearm may be used to dispatch a captured alligator. Centerfire firearms may be used to shoot unrestrained alligators during daylight hours only (30 min. before official sunrise to 30 min. after official sunset).

**Bangsticks:** Bangsticks are a safe and effective tool for humanely killing alligators. Bangsticks or power heads, typically used by divers to kill fish, discharge a firearm cartridge upon contact. For a humane kill, the shot should be centered immediately behind the skull cap and angled toward the brain. It is recommended that the bangstick be used in compliance with the manufacturer's safety recommendations. When killing an alligator, the bangstick should be discharged below the waterline to reduce the potential for aerial dispersal of bullet and bone fragments. Keep in mind that to legally dispatch an alligator using a bangstick, the animal must be attached to a restraining line using methods as those previously described.



*Artwork courtesy of GADNR*

**WARNING:** A bangstick is a firearm under the laws of South Carolina, and should be treated at all times with the respect due such a device.

While these materials are offered to familiarize participants with the appropriate and safe use of a bangstick, SCDNR cannot warrant that such use will be safe under all circumstances, nor is this brief introduction intended as a substitute for the degree of experience and knowledge necessary to safely utilize such a device. In the event you choose to utilize a bangstick to harvest alligators, you should select a model that the manufacturer deems appropriate for such use and should at all times comply with manufacturer's safety recommendations and specifications for use.

**Note:** Some of the above-listed tools or methods apply to the Private Lands Management Program only! Contact DNR if you have questions about allowable harvest methods.

## AVAILABILITY OF CAPTURE AND DISPATCH TOOLS

Bangsticks and/or other equipment:

- A list of alligator hunting equipment and service vendors is available on the DNR website at: [www.dnr.sc.gov/wildlife/alligator](http://www.dnr.sc.gov/wildlife/alligator)
- Snares can be found at most trap supply companies by searching for "trapping supplies" on the Internet.

**Note:** Alligator hunting equipment also may be available from your local outdoor sporting goods store or from other online vendors.

## WHAT TO DO AFTER AN ALLIGATOR IS HARVESTED

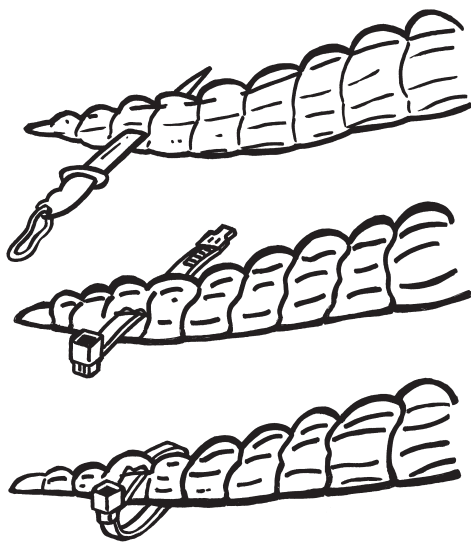
After the alligator is harvested, you must be prepared to do the following:

- Attach the harvest tag to the alligator's tail.
- Update the harvest report form within 24 hours of taking the animal.
- Cool the harvested alligator within 4 hours of harvest.
- If CITES validation is desired on a day other than the pre-selected validation days, you must make prior arrangements with a SCDNR Regional Office at least 24 hours in advance of the need for the tag. (see back page for a map listing the CITES locations).

## ATTACHING THE HARVEST TAG

You must attach the alligator harvest tag to the alligator carcass within six (6) inches of the tip of the tail (see diagram to the right) immediately after it is killed and before it is transported by boat or vehicle from the site of capture. The harvest tag must remain attached to the alligator hide at all times. Please note, it is difficult to cut through an alligator's hide, so take your time and be careful not to cut yourself. Also, be sure to clamp your harvest tag across the underside of the tail to avoid jeopardizing the ability to skin the hide.

*Attaching the Harvest Tag*



*Artwork courtesy of GADNR*

## COMPLETING THE HARVEST REPORT

The alligator harvest report must be updated within 24 hours of harvesting an alligator. A copy of the alligator harvest permit must accompany the alligator hide at all times. Please be sure to read and follow the directions carefully and fill the report out completely.

## COOLING THE HARVESTED ALLIGATOR

To maintain meat and hide quality, take necessary steps to cool your harvested alligator to 45 degrees Fahrenheit within four (4) hours after harvest.

## VALIDATING HIDES FOR CITES TAGS\*

Arrangements must be made in advance for harvesters desiring to obtain a CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) tag. Because the American alligator is *similar in appearance* to some endangered Crocodillians, the US Fish & Wildlife Service requires all alligator hides destined for export from the United States to be tagged with a state-issued CITES tag. All alligator carcasses or hides needing a CITES tag shall be taken during normal working hours (M-F, 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. – some locations may vary so you should call first) to a SCDNR Regional Office (locations and phone numbers listed on the back cover of this booklet), or other designated location, for CITES validation. Prior notification is required and an appointment must be scheduled in advance. The harvest tag must remain locked onto the alligator's tail until validation. CITES tags issued by SCDNR must remain attached to the



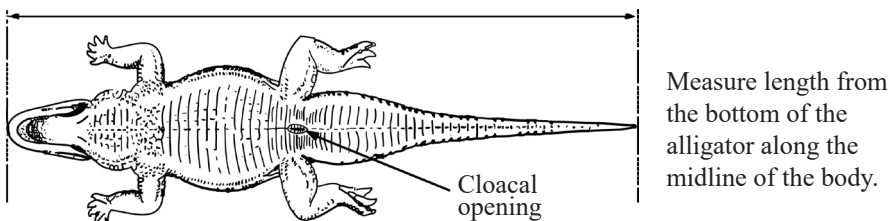
hide until it is tanned, taxidermy mounted or exported from the state. The possession of any untagged alligator hide (without either a harvest tag or a CITES tag) is prohibited.

***\*PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS FOR CITES TAGS MUST BE MADE BY APPOINTMENT WITH A DNR OFFICE.***

## **SEXING AN ALLIGATOR**

It is biologically important to know the sex of the alligators harvested during the private lands program. This information helps biologists to monitor the effects of harvest on the population. Do not assume all alligators over eight feet are male, as the sex of an alligator cannot be determined solely by size or appearance. As a participant in the private lands program, it is the landowner's responsibility to sex all alligators taken from his or her property during the harvest.

To determine the sex of an alligator, first find the cloacal opening underneath the alligator between the hind legs. Probe the opening with a finger and pull outward. If a penis projects from the opening, it is a male; if a small stub-like organ projects, it is a female.



## **SKINNING, PROCESSING, CURING AND TANNING**

### **SKINNING**

Skinning an alligator is a delicate process if the hunter wishes to retain the beauty of the hide. Patience and special care must be taken to prevent accidental knife cuts in the hide.

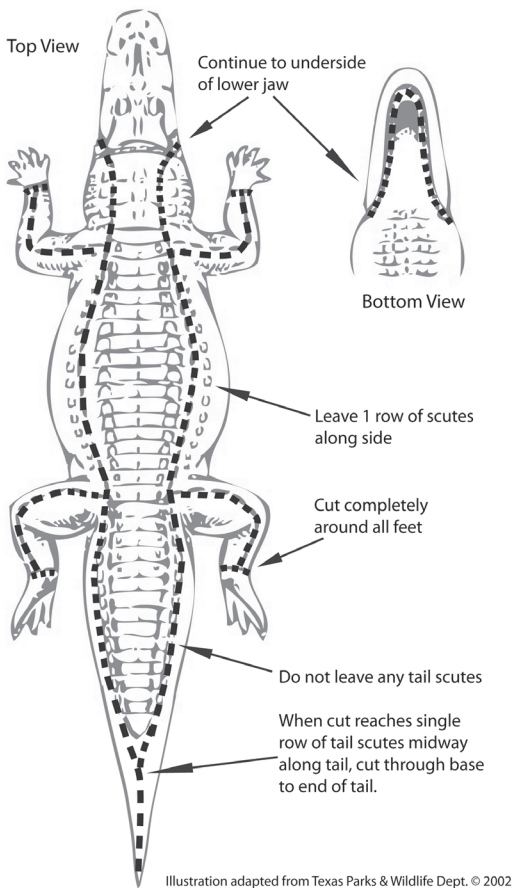
Alligators may be skinned in two different ways:

**Method 1** (*Scutes or osteoderms are the bony plates embedded in the back skin of an alligator. They give the alligator the bumpy appearance and protect the alligator.*) This method leaves the belly skin of the alligator intact and is the preferred method if the hide is to be sold or tanned and made into leather goods. This method consists of making an incision on each side of the alligator (leaving one to two rows of osteoderms or scutes along the belly side) and on the top of each leg and then removing the

hide with the belly skin intact. The underside of the skull also should be skinned with the rest of the belly. The back skin of the alligator with the osteoderms or scutes in it can then be removed and discarded or kept according to your wishes. Because of the difficulty of tanning the osteoderms, the back skin is not considered very useful and most often is discarded.

## Method 2

This method produces a more natural looking hide but generally is more costly to tan because of the osteoderms remaining in the hide. This method is similar to skinning a deer or a hog by making an incision up the belly of the alligator and on the underside of each leg. The hide can then be removed in its entirety and saved for tanning or selling.



Alligator skulls discarded must be permanently marked with the alligator harvest tag number of the hide from which they were taken. This marking may be written on the palate of the mouth after preservation. The skull and skeletal parts may be kept by the selected hunter, transferred or sold. Records must be kept indicating to whom skulls and/or other skeletal parts were transferred. A temporary tag or label can be created and attached to the skull before it is processed into a finished product.



*Temporary tag with harvest information*

## PROCESSING

Alligator meat may be processed and stored in a fashion similar to that for deer, hog and other game animals. While the tail meat is the most popular consumable meat of alligators, it is not the only edible portion. Many people find the ribs, legs, etc. very good. All packages of alligator meat transferred, transported, or stored, must be labeled “SC Alligator” and have the harvest tag number prominently displayed on each package with the quantity (pounds) of meat contained therein.

## PROCESSORS

Anyone can process alligators for personal use. Alligator meat taken under the Private Lands Harvest program can be sold, provided that alligator meat was processed in an approved alligator processing facility.

There are a number of alligator processors in the state, however there are very few approved and inspected facilities. Under no circumstances may alligator meat be sold for human consumption if the alligator was not processing in an approved alligator processing facility.

**Note:** SCDNR recommends that alligator meat be processed at an approved processing facility. These approved facilities are required to meet the same standards as seafood processors and are inspected and regulated by the SC Department of Agriculture.

## RECOMMENDED CONSUMPTION GUIDANCE FOR WILD ALLIGATOR

In conjunction with the limited harvest of alligators, the SCDNR is issuing recommendations on the consumption of wild alligator meat. Alligators are long-lived, may grow to large sizes, and may accumulate significant amounts of mercury. Information on mercury in alligators harvested in South Carolina is limited but suggests that certain people may be at risk if consumption of alligator meat occurs.

SCDNR has carefully reviewed this information, and recommends that the general population eat no more than 1 meal per week (8 ounces or ½ pound) of alligator meat. Pregnant women, nursing mothers, and young children may be especially sensitive to the effects of mercury. For this potentially sensitive population, SCDNR recommends that no more than 1 meal per month be consumed. This recommendation may be particularly important if you are a frequent consumer of locally caught

fish, which also may contain mercury. For further information, contact the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) Bureau of Water Division at (803) 898-4300.

## **TAXIDERMY AND TANNING**

If you wish to have the alligator mounted, contact one of the many commercial taxidermists in the state for assistance. If you wish to tan the alligator hide for leather products or similar purposes, contact one of the contract alligator tanneries listed below.\* The tannery can best provide assistance on the proper hide preparation and packaging as well as determining the color of the finished product.

American Tanning and Leather - [www.amtan.com](http://www.amtan.com)  
730 Pimento Avenue, Bldg A, Griffin, GA, 30224 (770) 228-4433

Specialty Leather Processors - [www.specialtyleather.com](http://www.specialtyleather.com)  
2135 Industrial Park Rd, Boone, IA 50036 (515) 433-0176

Sebring Custom Tanning - [www.sebringcustomtanning.com](http://www.sebringcustomtanning.com)  
429 Webster Turn Drive, Sebring, FL 33870 (863) 655-1600

\*There may be other tanneries or even individuals throughout the US that will process alligator hides. Your local taxidermist may be able to assist you in having your alligator hide tanned.

**Note:** A tannery may require a CITES tag to process an alligator hide. Check with the facility before shipping any hides or your shipment may be refused, costing you time and money as well as the potential loss of your hide(s).

## **CURING**

Two methods may be used to temporarily preserve and/or cure alligator skin until sold or sent to a tannery. Method one is through repeated salting of the hide and storing it in a cool, dry location. Method two (which utilizes some similar techniques to method one) is through the use of a brine solution.

### **Method 1**

After an alligator has been skinned, the hide should be scraped thoroughly using a knife, a piece of metal pipe or another appropriate object until all bits of meat, fat, etc. are removed. After scraping, salt the

hide with approximately one inch of white, fine grade table or mixing salt (available at most feed and seed stores). Thoroughly rub the salt into the hide, then roll the hide tightly, secure it and store it in a cool place. After 3-5 days, unroll the hide, discard the salt and repeat the salting procedure as described above. Re-roll the hide tightly and band with a one-inch rubber band or other rubber tubing. Store the rolled hide in a cool, dry place until transported for validation.

## **Method 2**

An alternative to method one is to utilize a brine solution. Hides cured in brine solutions often remain more supple, suffer less shrinkage and are viewed as more attractive by hide graders and buyers. For these reasons, the use of a brine solution to cure an alligator hide is highly recommended.

Ingredients or materials needed:

- 50-gallon covered plastic drum
- 50 pounds salt
- 1 pint bleach (assists in keeping bacterial growth to a minimum)
- 25 gallons water

To be effective, the solution must be carefully prepared and maintained. A plastic or other non-corrosive covered container of sufficient size should be used. Heavy, 50-gallon plastic drums used for shipping produce are best, but large plastic covered garbage cans are good substitutes. The solution must remain saturated with salt. Too little salt will cause damage to a hide. Fill the 50-gallon container half-full of water, then add the salt and the bleach and mix thoroughly. After complete mixing, a 2-3 inch layer of salt should remain on the bottom. Hides should be properly scraped and salted with a one-inch layer of salt, tightly rolled and secured with a rubber band prior to placing in the brine. When submersing a hide in the brine, rotate it to allow most of the air pockets to escape. If properly salted, the layer of salt in the rolled skin will act as a wick to draw the brine solution throughout the skin. The hide should be entirely submersed in the brine at all times and the container should be kept tightly covered to keep insects and airborne contaminants from entering the solution. The hide should remain in the brine solution until sold or sent to a tannery. If you plan on selling the hide, it must be removed from the brine and entirely re-salted prior to being shipped or placed in refrigeration. The brine should be discarded and a new solution made after each use. Disposal of the salt brine should be done properly and carefully since it is harmful to plants and aquatic animal life.

## SUGGESTED TIMELINE FOR YOUR HARVEST

As with other hunting excursions, there are many details to consider when embarking on an alligator hunt. SCDNR has put together the following suggested time line to help you review what, when and how these details should be handled:

- Remember that anyone participating in the harvest must possess a valid SC hunting license or be under 16 years old. Nonresidents must pay the additional \$200 hunting fee if 16 years of age or older.
- Adequate preparation is needed to ensure proper knowledge of equipment needs.
- Restrain, capture and harvest your alligator(s).
- Once harvested, attach the Private Lands Alligator Harvest tag within 6 inches of the tip of the tail.
- Update the alligator harvest report within 24 hours of harvest.
- Cool the alligator within four hours of harvesting.
- If you need to have hides validated for CITES tags on days other than the pre-determined validation days, you will need to schedule an appointment with a SCDNR Regional Office during business hours (M-F, 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.), if desired. Office locations and numbers are listed in the front of this booklet. Arrangements for CITES tag validation at other SCDNR Wildlife Section field offices may be possible with prior notification.

*Prior arrangements with a SCDNR Office must be made to obtain CITES validation tags.*

## SALE OR TRANSFER OF ALLIGATOR PRODUCTS

Alligator meat from animals taken under the Private Lands Alligator Harvest Program can be sold. However, any meat destined for sale ***must be processed in a facility approved by the SC Department of Agriculture for processing alligator meat.*** Meat to be sold must also include any SC Department of Agriculture required labeling in addition to being clearly labeled “SC Alligator” with the corresponding harvest tag number and the pounds of meat contained in the package.

Alligator hides and parts taken under the Private Lands Harvest Program can be sold under the following conditions (keep records of sales transactions):

- Hides must be tagged with either a CITES or SC Harvest tag before being sold, transferred, bartered or given to another person.

- Most tanneries or hide buyers require a CITES tag to process or purchase an alligator hide. *Contact DNR in advance to arrange for CITES tag validation.*
- Parts of hides must be tagged or packaged with a label, receipt, or other document indicating the harvester's name, date, and harvest tag number. This must be retained until such time that the part becomes a finished item.
- Alligator skulls must be permanently labeled or marked "SC Alligator" with the corresponding alligator harvest tag number. A temporary label or tag can be used until the skull is a finished product. The harvester's name or private lands property name is optional.
- Parts other than hides or skulls may be sold, but records must be kept indicating to whom these parts were sold.
- Finished products made from the American alligator must be visibly labeled "American alligator."
- The final end users of finished alligator products such as leather goods, footwear, novelties, etc., are not required to maintain the labeling requirement mentioned above.

For example, a wallet made from alligator must have a tag, label, or other inscription clearly showing it was made from American alligator when offered for sale. However, the purchaser and user of this wallet is not required to keep the label or tag attached to the item.



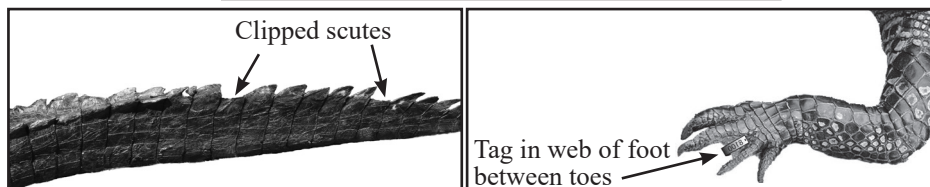
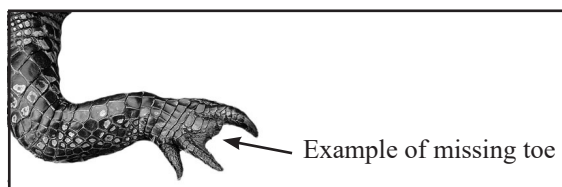
*Alligator Skull (ventral view) showing required harvest information, lower jaw is not shown.*



## PLEASE REPORT ANY TAGGED, MARKED, OR GPS-EQUIPPED ALLIGATORS

### Tagged or marked alligators - what to look for:

- Metal tags between toes.
- Missing toes (no longer used, but marked animals still exist).
- Plastic or metal tags attached to scutes along the tail.
- Obvious missing scutes along tail, starting with the two tall rows of scutes along the tail to the end of the tail. Take pictures of any potentially marked alligators.
- Record and report tag numbers along with exact location of harvest.
- Note locations of missing scutes and/or toes.
- Contact the SCDNR Alligator Program at (803) 734-3609.

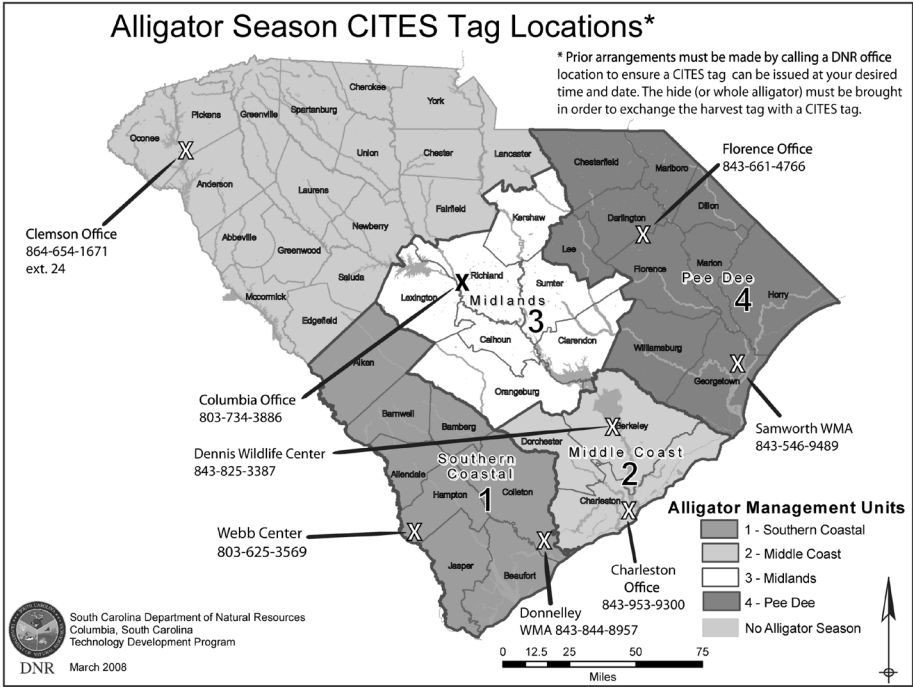


Examples of marked or tagged alligators.

### GPS-equipped alligators - what to look for:

- DNR and Clemson University currently have a limited number of adult alligators with a GPS telemetry package attached directly to the back/neck area of the alligator.
- Contact DNR immediately at 1-800-922-5431 to arrange for someone at DNR to come pick up of the transmitter from any harvested alligator. These transmitters may have useful battery life remaining or may be refurbished and used again.

*DNR protects and manages South Carolina's natural resources by making wise and balanced decisions for the benefit of the state's natural resources and its people.  
Find out more about DNR at [www.dnr.sc.gov](http://www.dnr.sc.gov).*



Phillip Jones, SCDNR

The cost of this publication is paid for by the hunters and managers who apply for and participate in the Private Lands Alligator Hunting Program.

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